

Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Audit



May 21, 2014



Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

Comprehensive Plan

5-Year Audit

May 21st, 2014

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the 2007 Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Audit (“Audit”) is to review issues of compliance with the State Comprehensive Planning Enabling Legislation and the Priority Investment Act (“PIA”) and to ensure the plan is an effective and user-friendly guide for future development decisions. Based on the Town’s needs, the Audit was divided into five primary sub-tasks (1.1-1.5 below). These tasks covered updates to demographic data, required content, PIA requirement, plan implementation, and recent trends in the planning profession.

1.1 DEMOGRAPHICS UPDATE

Demographic data, including the Town’s most recent population, housing and economic information, was updated as a part of this project. Updates to the Population, Housing, and Economic Development Chapters in addition to the Technical Appendix primarily include 2010 US Census data. The update can serve as a base inventory of existing conditions for future planning efforts.

Noteworthy observations include:

- Increase in seasonal dwelling units;
- Higher proportion of residents 14 and under and 35-44;
- Significant increase in Hispanic and Latino residents;
- Major decrease in housing growth after the 2008 downturn but indicators of recovery beginning in 2012;
- New housing stock, more than three-quarters built after 2000;
- Increase of rent (38%) and housing value (54%);
- Significant increase in the labor force.

More information on demographic trends and their implications for the Plan are described in Section 2 of the Audit.

1.2 REQUIRED ELEMENTS AND CONTENT

While most of the required content was included in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, there is some missing data and some that is out of date and unusable for planning purposes. Section 6-29-510 (D) of the State Planning Enabling Act outlines the required content for each element. While demographic data was updated as a part of Section 2, this section includes an inventory compliance/content checklist and provides suggested data sources for use during future updates.

Overall, much of the data is outdated and newer, more accurate sources exist. The most significant source of data is the US Census Bureau. As the last plan was adopted well after the 2000 Decennial Census, some of the data relied upon was already 7 years old. More recent data from the 2005 Special Census is also out of date. To better assess past and existing conditions and improve future projections and goal setting, the plan should be updated with the latest data available, including but not limited to the 2010 US Census and other sources listed within Section 2.



In some cases, the SC law notes that a topic is to be addressed but does not give detail about how much information needs to be in the Plan. In many cases, the discussion can be very general. For some topics, like stormwater management, housing, and coastal resources, the town has undertaken detailed studies well beyond the typical comprehensive plan. While those studies can be referenced or summarized to alert the reader that they exist, separate documents should not necessarily be officially incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan by reference as attachments. This would require that each time one of those separate studies is updated, it would need to follow the SC Planning Act process. So in those cases, where the audit identifies “updates recommended” the recommendation means the comprehensive plan language needs to be refreshed; it does not mean an extensive amount of new data must be included in the plan.

Missing Content- Required by State Law

- Archaeological resources
- Coastal resources
- Slope characteristics
- Prime agricultural land
- Parks and recreation in Natural Resources Chapter (reference Community Facilities)
- Analysis of nonessential housing regulations
- Market-based incentives for affordable housing
- Cultural resources in Community Facilities Chapter- reference inclusion in Cultural Resources Chapter
- Transportation and land use element coordination
- Recommended public infrastructure

Recommended

- Contributing structures
- Labor force characteristics- skills and qualifications
- Business licenses by industry
- Analysis of economic base (trends, cluster analysis, demand forecasting, opportunities)
- Government facilities and property
- Educational facilities
- Existing land use inventory and map (PUD is not a category)
- Major road improvements
- New road construction
- Transit projects
- Pedestrian and bicycle projects
- Analysis of funds for public infrastructure

1.3 PRIORITY INVESTMENT ACT

The main intent of the Priority Investment Act (“PIA”) is to better plan for public infrastructure and expenditures by opening and improving lines of communication with adjacent jurisdictions and applicable agencies. Essentially the PIA embraces a more transparent process in the selection of infrastructure projects and their funding. After 2007, South Carolina required that a Priority Investment



element be included as an element of the Comprehensive Plan to link projects envisioned during the planning process to the Town's Capital Improvement Program ("CIP") and budgeting process. In this way, the chapter serves as an overarching guide to major public expenditures with adjustments and refinements made through the annual CIP process. Necessary revisions to the existing Priority Investment Chapter to comply with the PIA include:

- Provide a full list projects identified through the comprehensive planning process that are then expected to be gradually incorporated into the program.

Recommended revisions include:

- Update current CIP funding sources. Expand and update the list of available federal, state and local funds that are most applicable for the types of capital projects envisioned.
- Formalize coordination and communication with adjacent jurisdictions and agencies.
- Consideration of "Priority Investment Zones" that serve as target areas to initiate market based incentives or areas to relax or eliminate certain housing regulatory requirements to encourage private development of affordable housing.
- Full structural revision to the Priority Investment chapter consistent with the outline proposed in Section 4.6.

1.4 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Town has made significant progress implementing the 2007 Comprehensive Plan and the document is generally structured in compliance with state-required approach to planning. We have presented several recommendations to increase the effectiveness of this approach and the document as both a policy guide and a 10-year work plan. This will ensure the action steps moving forward are concise, consolidated and achievable and can be easily monitored on a more frequent, potentially annual, basis.

The 2007 plan includes an exhaustive list of policies, potential partnerships, services, programs and specific actions to achieve goals. Our summary-level review of the implementation strategy revealed a number of findings which helped to guide our earlier recommendations. This review was conducted by the consultant in cooperation with town staff members involved in the planning process and was based on how the plan is used in Bluffton, compliance with the State Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act, the Priority Investment Act, input from multiple town departments, discussions with town staff and a study session with the Planning Commission.



The following table summarizes the implementation audit:

Implementation Strategy Audit- At a Glance			
Status	Total	Percent	Recommendation
Completed	51	16%	Delete but archive
Completed and implemented as a re-occurring program or service	75	23%	Keep, revise as necessary
Incomplete, but appropriate	35	11%	Keep, revise as necessary
In progress (with end date)	5	1.5%	Keep, revise as necessary
Current policy (without end date)	77	24%	Policies should not be included in the implementation table
Consolidated or not recommended	78	24%	Delete
Total	321	100%	

Based on this higher-level review of the strategy, we believe almost two-thirds of the actions can be removed from the implementation strategy to consolidate and streamline the Town's work plan.

1.5 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

After an assessment of demographics, state enabling legislation and effective implementation strategies, the final component of the Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan Audit is a review of best practices and trends in planning that may be applicable to Bluffton. As this audit also considered a general review of some of the best practices in planning on the following topics in the Plan, these ideas could be explored during the process to update the Plan.

- Effective use of available data (Section 6.1): Inventory of existing conditions and trends and how data can be used to plan for future facilities, infrastructure, services and land use.
- Transportation (Section 6.2): Creating safer, more attractive and accommodating for multiple modes of transportation.
- Affordable housing (Section 6.3): Removing regulatory barriers, creating incentives and assessing tools to provide housing affordable to a wide range of residents.
- Economic development (Section 6.4): Study of the market, demand and economic opportunities to set the stage for land use scenario planning.
- Land use planning (Section 6.5): Selection of preferred land use scenarios based present and future economic conditions, the resulting financial yield and future land use planning for implementation of the scenario.
- Implementation (Section 6.6): A consolidated and user-friendly work plan to achieve the Town's goals.



1.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter provides the Town with recommendations concerning priority “interim” revisions prior to a full Comprehensive Plan re-write. Priorities are generally those revisions that will ensure state-compliance and those which will most effectively assist present day efforts, such as economic development.



2 DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic data, including the Town's most recent population, housing and economic information, was updated as a part of this project. Updates to the Population, Housing, and Economic Development Chapters in addition to the Technical Appendix primarily included 2010 US Census data. Population projections were also provided which used the same methodology as the SC State Data Center and the Lowcountry Regional Traffic Model (same growth rates applied). Sections 2.1 through 2.3 include notable trends and changes; primarily during the 2000 to 2010 timeframe. The three chapters and appendix noted earlier have been provided to Town staff for review and consideration.

The population and demographic trends from 2000 to 2010 include the collapse of the housing market in 2008 and the lingering effects of the worst economic crisis since the 1930's. Population growth will likely be at very low levels during recovery, according to the State Data Center. However, the Town is already experience positive changes since this significant event as indicated the ten-year highlights in the following sections.

2.1 POPULATION

- Current growth rates used by the State Data Center and Lowcountry Regional Traffic model indicate modest future growth, but much less than projections developed in 2007.
- Seasonal, recreational and occasional use of the vacant housing stock increased from ten to 373 units and the overall proportion increased from 2% to 6.9% of the vacant housing stock.
- Age distribution shows a higher proportion of younger residents in the under 14 years of age and 25-54 age groups and lower proportions of those aged 20-24 and 55 and up. The most significant overall percentage increases age groups 9 years and under, 20-34 and 55-74, trends showing the need to plan for young children, young adults/parents and the retiring population.
- The amount of residents of Hispanic or Latino origin increased from 553 to 2,355 (326%) from 2005-2010 compared to an increase from 4,332 to 10,175 (135%) for Non-Hispanic or Latino residents during this same timeframe. Residents of Hispanic or Latino origin made up 11% of the population in 2005, while this percentage grew to nearly 19% of the total in 2010.
- The count of family households has remained steady in Bluffton (75%).
- Average household increased from 2.74 members to 2.84.
- The latter half of the last decade saw a drastic decline in number of permits issued for residential construction as similar to the experiences of many communities across the United States during the same period. However, new residential permits increased from an 8-year low of 161 in 2009 to 274 in 2012, a positive upward trend.

2.2 HOUSING

- Home ownership is a key indicator of overall community stability. In 2010, Bluffton had a higher owner-occupancy rate (76.5%) than Beaufort County (70.7%), although this number dropped from 80% in 2000.
- The proportion of renter-occupied housing units increased approximately 5%.
- The majority of homes in Bluffton were built in the last decade. Most notably, the median year of housing unit construction was 2003 and 77% of units were built between 2000 and 2009.



- Median home values increased from \$155,900 to \$240,800 (54%).
- Median rent increased \$718 to \$1,221 (70%).
- The amount of homeowners spending greater than 29% of their income on housing costs increased from 29.1% to 54.4%, meaning that housing costs may have increased significantly faster than area income or there is the need for more affordable housing options.
- The amount of renters spending greater than 29% of their income on housing costs increased from 28.3% to 45.5%, showing rents are increasing faster than area incomes and affordable options are needed.

2.3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The regional labor market consisted of 5,698 employed Town residents in 2010, an increase from 735 in 2000 (675%). While the 2005 annexation of the Buck Island and Simmonsville area contributed to this increase, the majority of new workers migrated to Bluffton between 2005 and 2010 during this high growth period. In 2010, most were employed in the education and arts sector (31%) while other top industries were trade (14%) and construction (12%).
- In 2010, most Bluffton workers lived and worked in Beaufort County and almost three-quarters commuted alone. The percentage of residents driving alone was higher in 2010 than in 2000 and the percentage participating in carpools dropped. This trend indicates that an increasing amount of Bluffton's residents are commuting alone instead of carpooling and using alternative means of transportation.
- Most of Bluffton residents drove less than twenty-five minutes to work in 2010 which is similar to 2000 commuting patterns.



3 REQUIRED ELEMENTS AND CONTENT

State mandated elements of the Comprehensive Plan include: population, economic development, natural resources, cultural resources, community facilities, housing, land use, transportation, and priority investment. Section 6-29-510 (D) of the State Planning Enabling Act outlines the required content for each element. While demographic data was updated as a part of Section 2, this section includes an inventory compliance/content checklist and provides suggested data sources for use during future updates.

3.1 REQUIRED CONTENT

While most of the required content was included in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, there is some missing data and some that is extremely out of date and unusable for planning purpose. In addition, there are some new “best practices” in planning that can be woven into a Plan update. Therefore, our content review includes the following classifications:

- ✓ - Included: Mandated content is included and remains valid.
- ✗ - Missing: Mandated content is not included.
- ! - Updates recommended: Mandated content is included but out of date and should be updated to support new Plan policies and recommendations (equivalent to missing data). We also suggest that data trends and their implications on planning be noted.

Note: We also suggest new content to address changes in the Town since 2007, new opportunities and integration of best practices for development, redevelopment and streets/infrastructure.

Note: Items marked “updated” were considered out of date and were updated as a part of Section 2 of this Audit.

3.2 DATA REVIEW

An inventory and assessment of past and present conditions is the basis for the development of goals that address opportunities or threats. As informed decision making relies on accurate and recent data, this section focuses on the content included in the Town Comprehensive Plan and potential sources to access information for the plan update.

Overall, much of the data is outdated and newer, more accurate sources exist. The most significant source of data is the US Census Bureau. As the last plan was adopted well after the 2000 Decennial Census, some of the data relied upon was already 7 years old. More recent data from the 2005 Special Census is also out of date. To better assess past and existing conditions and improve future projections and goal setting, the plan should be updated with the latest data available, including but not limited to the 2010 US Census and other sources listed below. Unless noted otherwise, content listed below is mandated.

Since some of the Census data is also out of date, the Town could also look to purchase special demographic data by one of the specialty firms that provides estimates on income, spending habits, age,



housing needs etc. In addition, there are several agencies and organizations that have data that can be used, as listed in the table. Those groups should be contacted early in the update process to gain obtain current data and projections, and also to ensure the Town is aware of any new data being collected during the Plan update process.

3.2.1 Population

Content Required Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Historic trends and projections	! Updates recommended 1. Population trends (updated) 2. Population estimate (updated) 3. Future projections (updated)	1. US Census (2010) 2. SC Office of Resources and Statistics 3. Regional Traffic Model Projections 4. Census ACS 5 year estimates (2015)
Household numbers and sizes	Adopt Updates 1. Household distribution (updated) 2. Household size (updated) 3. Family size (updated)	1. US Census (2010)
Educational levels	Adopt Updates 1. Education attainment (updated)	1. US Census (2010)
Income characteristics	Adopt Updates 1. Median HH income (updated) 2. Per capita income 3. HH income distribution (updated) 4. Poverty (updated) 5. Homelessness (updated)	1. US Census (2010) 2. South Carolina Coalition for the Homeless (2013)
Not required: age, race, ethnicity, gender	Adopt Updates 1. Age (updated) 2. Race (updated) 3. Ethnicity (updated) 4. Gender (updated)	1. US Census (2010)



3.2.2 Cultural Resources

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Historic buildings and structures	<p style="text-align: center;">! <i>Updates recommended</i></p> <p>1. Local List of Contributing Structures 2. Beaufort County Above Ground Historic Resources (outside of Old Town).</p>	<p>1. Bluffton Contributing Structure List 2. Beaufort County Survey</p>
Commercial districts	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Bluffton Planning staff notes and edits.
Residential districts		
Unique, natural, or scenic resources		
Archaeological, and other cultural resources	<p style="text-align: center;">✗ <i>Missing</i></p> <p>1. Archaeological resources (not included)</p>	1. SC Dept. of History and Archives
Not required: Heritage tourism	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Bluffton Planning staff notes and edits
Not required: Controls and regulation	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available (new ordinances and zoning regulations)	1. Bluffton Planning staff notes and edits



3.2.3 Natural Resources

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Coastal resources	<p>✗ Missing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Current DHEC 303d rivers 2. Hydrologic Unit Code Watersheds 3. TMDLs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DHEC OCRM 2. SC DNR 3. Conservation District
Not required: Water resources	<p>! Updates recommended</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regional groundwater recharge areas 2. Stormwater Ordinance/ Manual & May River Action Plan 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SC DNR 2. Town staff.
Slope characteristics	<p>✗ Missing</p>	
Prime agricultural land	<p>✗ Missing</p>	US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Ser. Conservation District SC Department of Natural Resources
Prime forest land	<p>We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available and that prime forest land locations are noted.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Natural Resources Conservation Ser. 2. SC Forestry Commission
Plant and animal habitats	<p>We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Threatened and endangered species 2. Recorded conservation easements or preserved lands 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SC Department of Natural Resources 2. SOLO
Parks and recreation areas	<p>✗ Missing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Act requires that this topic is included in the Natural Resources element but it is located in Chapter 7, Community Facilities. While Chapter 7 is a more appropriate location for the topic, a clear reference should be placed in this Chapter to ensure compliance. 	
Scenic views and sites	<p>✓</p>	



Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Wetlands	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available, including specific wetland types-forested, un-forested and critical areas.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Army Corps of Engineers 2. National Wetland Inventory
Soil types	✓	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Geological Survey 2. Natural Resources Conservation Ser. 3. USDA Web Soils Data, include potential infiltration suitability



3.2.4 Housing

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Location, types, age, and condition of housing	<p style="text-align: center;">! Updates recommended</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Location- Include development summaries 2. Type (updated) 3. Number (updated) 4. Age (updated) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IT-GIS development mapping 2. Planning staff 3. US Census (2010)
Owner and renter occupancy	<p style="text-align: center;">Adopt Updates</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Occupancy (updated) 2. Renter/owner (updated) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Census (2010)
Affordability of housing	<p style="text-align: center;">Adopt Updates</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Value (updated) 2. Rent (updated) 3. Housing cost vs. income analysis (updated) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Census (2010) 2. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev.
Analysis to ascertain nonessential housing regulatory requirements	<p style="text-align: center;">✗ Missing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See appendix A
Analysis of market-based incentives that may be made available to encourage development of affordable housing	<p style="text-align: center;">✗ Missing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See appendix B



3.2.5 Economic Development

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Labor force and labor force characteristics	<p style="text-align: center;">!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Updates recommended</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skills and qualifications 2. Industries (updated) 3. Business licenses by industry (2006) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Census (2010) 2. Economic Target Cluster Study #1 3. Chamber of Commerce 4. SC Power Team 5. SC Department of Commerce 6. US Bureau of Labor Statistics 7. SC Dept. of Employ. & Workforce 8. SC Office of Research and Statistics 9. Town Business License Database
Employment by place of work and residence	<p style="text-align: center;">Adopt Updates</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Industry for employed population 16+ (updated) 2. Place of work (updated) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Census (2010) 2. SC DOT
Analysis of the economic base	<p style="text-align: center;">!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Updates recommended</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employment Trends 2. Cluster analysis 3. Demand forecasting 4. Opportunities, strengths, weaknesses 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Census (2010) 2. Economic Target Cluster Study #1 & #2 3. Chamber of Commerce 4. SC Power Team 5. SC Department of Commerce 6. Bureau of Labor Statistics 7. Dept. of Employment & Workforce 8. Office of Research and Statistics
Not required: Commuting patterns	<p style="text-align: center;">Adopt Updates</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Means of transportation (updated) 2. Drive time (updated) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US Census (2010)



3.2.6 Community Facilities

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Water supply, treatment, and distribution	✓	
Sewage system and wastewater treatment	✓	
Solid waste collection and disposal	! Updates recommended 1. Landfill projections 2. Recycling information	1. Beaufort County- DHEC Annual Report 2. Waste Management 3. DHEC Solid Waste Division
Fire protection	! Updates recommended 1. ISO 2. Facilities	1. Staff 2. Bluffton Fire District
Emergency medical services	! Updates recommended We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Bluffton Fire District
General government facilities	! Updates recommended 1. Town Hall, facilities, properties	1. Town Staff
Education facilities	! Updates recommended 1. Schools 2. Enrollment and capacity (2005)	1. Beaufort County School District
Libraries	✓	
Cultural facilities	✗ Missing 1. The Act requires that this topic is also included in the Community Facilities element but it is discussed in a stand-alone Cultural Facilities Chapter. A clear reference should be placed in this Chapter to ensure compliance.	1. Cultural Facilities Element



Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Not required: IT	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Staff review
Not required: Law Enforcement	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Staff review
Not required: Electric and Gas	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Staff review 2. SCE&G 3. Palmetto Electric
Not required: Telecommunications	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available.	1. Providers
Not required: Stormwater Management	We suggest this data is updated with the newest information available. 1. Capital infrastructure projects 2. Stormwater program. 3. May River Watershed Action Plan. 4. Design Manual 5. Cross reference Natural Resource Chapter.	1. Town staff



3.2.7 Land Use

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Existing land by categories, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forestry, mining, public and quasi-public, recreation, parks, open space, and vacant or undeveloped	<p style="text-align: center;">!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Updates recommended</p> <p>1. PUD is not an existing land use. Instead of PUD as a category, include the current uses of land within PUD zoned land for a present day inventory of existing conditions (Map 8.2)</p>	<p>1. Town staff (IT/GIS, planning) 2. Aerial photos</p>
Future land use by categories, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forestry, mining, public and quasi-public, recreation, parks, open space, and vacant or undeveloped	<p style="text-align: center;">!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Updates recommended</p> <p>1. Revise Future Land Use Map (Maps 8.3 and 8.4) 2. Consider existing and planned roads, pathways and transit projects</p>	<p>1. Workshops and public input 2. Staff, Planning Commission, Council. 3. Transportation Element</p>



3.2.8 Transportation

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Transportation facilities	! Updates recommended 1. Functional classification changes.	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff
Major road improvements	! Updates recommended 1. Widening projects- update with 2014 progress (Map 9.4).	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff
New road construction	! Updates recommended 1. New roads- update with 2014 progress (Map 9.4).	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff
Transit projects	! Updates recommended 1. Bus system projects 2. Ferry system planning	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff 5. Daufuskie Neighborhood Council
Pedestrian and bicycle projects	! Updates recommended 1. Pathways, existing and planned (Map 9.5)	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff
Other elements of a transportation network	! Updates recommended 1. Traffic volume (2006) 2. Level of service (present/future)	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff
Coordination with the land use element	✗ Missing 1. Future Land Use strategy should acknowledge existing and future planned road, pathway and sidewalk projects. 2. Incorporate Growth Framework Map	1. SCDOT 2. Beaufort County 3. COG/MPO 4. Town staff



3.2.9 Priority Investment

Content Required- Section 6-29-510 (D)	Content Review ✓ - Included ✗ - Missing ! - Updates Recommended	Sources
Analysis of the likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities during the next ten years	<p style="text-align: center;">!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Updates recommended</p>	1. SC Department of Transportation 2. Palmetto Electric 3. SCE&G 4. SC Department of Commerce 5. SC Parks Recreation & Tourism 6. Low Country Council of Governments
Recommended public infrastructure and facilities such as water, sewer, roads, and schools (10-years)	<p style="text-align: center;">✗</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Missing</p> 1. Needed road capital improvements included in appendix (2006 County impact fee study)	1. Town staff 2. Beaufort County
Coordination with adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies	<p style="text-align: center;">!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Updates recommended</p> 1. Coordinated approach to Comprehensive Plan update	1. Regional Planning Resolution, Southern Beaufort County Regional Plan



4 PRIORITY INVESTMENT

The main intent of the Priority Investment Act (PIA) is to better plan for public infrastructure and expenditures by opening and improving lines of communication with adjacent jurisdictions and applicable agencies. According to the Municipal Association of SC, “too often one community’s plans for roads, water, sewer, and schools are not coordinated with neighboring communities resulting in expensive and poorly planned public structures” so the PIA will ensure open and honest communication to best account for public use of funds for infrastructure. As Chapter 10 in the Comprehensive Plan was finalized soon after the passage of the Act, our technical review includes a compliance assessment, a discussion of the priority investment area concept and model outline. This Section outlines changes that we recommend be made when Chapter 10 of Comprehensive Plan is updated.

4.1 OVERVIEW

South Carolina’s Priority Investment Act (“PIA”) is intended to improve coordination and agreement on priorities for public infrastructure and capital improvements through more effective lines of communication with adjacent jurisdictions and applicable agencies. Essentially PIA embraces a more transparent process in the selection of infrastructure projects and their funding. South Carolina requires that the PIA be included as an element of the Comprehensive Plan to link projects envisioned during the planning process to the Town’s Capital Improvement Program (“CIP”) and budgeting process. In this way, the PIA serves as an overarching guide to major public expenditures with adjustments and refinements made through the annual CIP process.

4.2 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN VERSUS CIP

Since the Town has a robust CIP program in place for planning, funding, prioritizing and implementing capital projects, the Priority Investment Chapter needs to support that process rather than replacing it. However the existing plan language was created when the PIA was in its infancy. Some changes are warranted to better acknowledge the existing CIP program with more explanation on the link between planning for public investments in the Comp Plan versus CIP programming. This new language should clarify that the planning process is a precursor to the CIP that lists projects of a more conceptual nature and identifies candidate projects prior to the details, budgeting and specific funding incorporated into a CIP. This can be explained as being similar to the role of the Future Land Use map as a general guide to land use and zoning decisions, as the Priority Investment Chapter can generally influence the types of projects which are placed on the CIP list. In addition, the PIA has some secondary requirements that are elements already addressed in the Comp Plan (such as traditional neighborhood design and affordable) that can be better highlighted in the Plan update. The recommended outline is presented with this dynamic in mind.

4.3 PRIORITY INVESTMENT ELEMENT



The PIA was signed into law on May 23rd, 2007, only four months prior to the adoption of the Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan 10-year update. The Act amended State planning and zoning enabling legislation and the requirements of the comprehensive plan and planning process. As the Town's 2007 update was one of the first adopted after the PIA, there was very little guidance available, such as outlines, templates or model elements. While the Act covers a number of other factors, including affordable housing and priority investment "zones," at its core it requires an element that includes funding sources, projects and a strategy for coordination.

[The] priority investment element...analyzes the likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities during the next ten years, and recommends the projects for expenditure of those funds during the next ten years for needed public infrastructure and facilities such as water, sewer, roads, and schools. The recommendation of those projects for public expenditure must be done through coordination with adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies (SECTION 6-29-510 D 9).

A secondary focus of the PIA is to redefine affordable housing, promote traditional neighborhood design, and to provide additional tools to encourage affordable housing and development. This is consistent with past, present and planned Town efforts as evident in the UDO and through special projects. While we have addressed the affordable housing assessment and recommendation in Task #3, the PIA required elements and content analysis and the topic of "zones" will be covered in the following section.

4.4 COMPLIANCE ASSESSMENT

As outlined earlier, the following three components are required in the Priority Investment Chapter. This section assesses compliance with a greater focus than Task #3 of the Comprehensive Plan Audit.

4.4.1 Funding Analysis

Analysis of the likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities during the

PRIORITY INVESTMENT ACT TERMS

"Affordable housing" is defined in S.C. Code sec. 6-29-1110(1) using the total cost for a dwelling unit for sale, including mortgage, amortization, taxes, insurance, and condominium and association fees. By state law, qualified affordable housing constitutes no more than 28% (30% for rental unit) of the annual household income for a household earning no more than 80% of the area's median income, by household size.

"Traditional neighborhood design," commonly referenced as TND, is defined in S.C. Code sec. 6-29-1110(5) as a development pattern intended to enhance the appearance and functionality of new development so that it functions like a traditional neighborhood or town. TND makes possible higher residential densities, a mixture of residential and commercial land uses, single and multi-family housing types, and pedestrian- and bicycle friendly roadways. Overall, the aim of this portion of the Act is to encourage local governments to reevaluate their comprehensive plans in such a way as to slow the growth of sprawl, prioritize projects and funding, and create new opportunities for affordable housing throughout the state.



next ten years is required by the PIA.

The 2007 Plan lists the Community Infrastructure Bank (CIB) and the General Fund as the primary sources of CIP funding (Section 10.1). Moreover, the grants and partnerships are identified as secondary funding sources. While accurate at the time of adoption, this information is outdated and currently inaccurate as these are not the likely funds for public infrastructure and facilities. Section 10.5 elaborates upon additional federal, state and local funds available.

Suggested changes:

- Update current CIP funds and likely funds and sources.
- Expand and update the list of available federal, state and local funds that are most applicable for the types of capital projects envisioned.

4.4.2 Recommended Projects

The PIA also requires a list of recommended public infrastructure and facilities such as water, sewer, roads, and schools (10-years).

The Plan does not include a list of projects as required by the PIA. Instead, it refers to project categories listed in the six-year CIP and mentions the dynamic nature of the CIP program. The CIP guided the development of the Priority Investment Chapter instead of the plan guiding the program. That is all valuable language but there needs to be a separate list of the conceptual capital projects anticipated when the Comprehensive Plan is prepared. These should include general descriptions, the purpose or problem being addressed, and a general description of costs and funding. The idea is to list projects identified through the comprehensive planning process that are then expected to be gradually incorporated into the program. While all Comprehensive Plan projects may not be within the CIP timeframe or may not be financially feasible at the time, they should be listed as a part of the planning effort and incorporated into the program as appropriate.

Recommended changes to comply with Act:

- Include project list.

Suggested changes:

- Plan for needed improvements during the 2014 update (all chapters).
- Categorize infrastructure and facility projects: community facilities, transportation and environmental projects.
- Generally prioritize and rank projects (high level).

4.4.3 Coordination

To satisfy the intent of the PIA, coordination with adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies is necessary.

The Southern Beaufort County Regional Plan ("SBCRP") Implementation Committee once served as an active and effective entity to facilitate communication and coordination for all planning and infrastructure efforts. The committee and its associated staff working groups satisfied the collaborative intent of the PIA. Section 10.4 outlines the communication and coordination and complies with the PIA.



An “Official Map” is not a required by the Act and does not appear to be a priority for the Town or for the majority of municipalities in South Carolina. However, the discussion of this topic is valuable as it revolves around coordinated public infrastructure planning. Generally, we feel this section is unnecessary.

Suggested changes:

- Recharge and re-task the SBCRP Implementation Committee with a new mission: support of the PIA intent and purpose.
- Delete Section 10.2 if deemed unnecessary and no longer applicable.

4.5 PRIORITY INVESTMENT ZONES

The concept of Priority Investment Zones was introduced in the 2007 Plan. In these zones, the Town may adopt market based incentives or relax or eliminate certain housing regulatory requirements to encourage private development of affordable housing. Affordable housing is defined as 28% of the annual household income for a household earning no more than 80% of the area’s median income (adjusted by household size). While there are a number of zoning tools available, the benefit of a Priority Investment overlay or floating zone is that it could be applied anywhere in the Town to provide flexibility and incentives. The resulting tools can be less cumbersome than the PUD process and streamlined to be attractive to developers.

With the use of a tool of this nature, additional factors in a qualifying criteria should be development and in no case should housing types prohibited in a district be allowed. The tool is meant to relax “non-essential” housing regulations to promote affordable housing and encourage TND design. However, the Town should be cautious during consideration as the intent of the underlying zoning district must be respected.

Suggested changes:

- Assess affordable housing incentives provided in the UDO.
- Consider Priority Investment Zones for target redevelopment areas or for the Small Home Infill Series Program.
- Include zones as potential overlay or floating zones in the UDO.

4.6 PRIORITY INVESTMENT CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following is a recommended outline to reformat and revise Chapter 10, Priority Investment.

Introduction

- A. Discussion of the purpose and intent of the chapter.
- B. Overview of state law, objectives and required content.
- C. Comprehensive Plan versus Capital Improvements Program.

10.1 Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

- A. Overview and purpose of the program.



B. Project types/categories.

C. Financial information- an inventory of available funding streams in use today to fund public infrastructure and facilities.

D. Local, state and federal funding- potential sources.

10.2 Comprehensive Plan Projects

A. Introduction: Overview of the planning process and discussion of new infrastructure necessary to meet level of service goals versus needed fixes or repairs to old or obsolete facilities and infrastructure.

B. Project List: Public infrastructure and facilities needed over the ten-year planning horizon to ensure adequate capacity is reserved to serve the magnitude and timing of anticipated development in the Future Land Use Map of the Comprehensive Plan.

10.3 Prioritization

A. Methodology: Determination of capital improvements required to achieve and maintain desired levels of service and to repair and replace public facilities. This methodology should take into account both capital costs and the cost to operate and maintain proposed capital improvements in order to achieve the best use of funds and potential overall cost savings.

B. Prioritization: The Town should set the relative priorities among types of projects as follows:

1. Priority 1: New public facilities and improvements to existing facilities that address immediate needs and eliminate public hazards (Years 1-2).
2. Priority 2: The repair, renovation or replacement of obsolete or worn out facilities that are necessary to achieve or maintain existing levels of service and eliminate existing deficiencies in levels of service (Years 3-5).
3. Priority 3: New and expanded facilities necessary to serve new development and redevelopment projected during the next 10 years (Years 6-10).

C. Recommendations: Conceptual and candidate projects for the CIP with generalized cost level ranges of very high, high, medium and low.



5 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

One of the key updates to the Comprehensive Plan will be the implementation strategies – a list of actions and accountability for each action. Implementation actions that have been completed should be removed, but acknowledged as evidence of the plan’s usefulness, such as addressing major accomplishments since 2007 in the introduction to the updated Plan. Some actions in the current plan may no longer be applicable or need to be refined. In some cases, action may not have occurred as expected because the priority or importance was lost over the last seven years. This Section includes a technical review that provides an assessment of the effectiveness of the strategies included in the current plan and suggests a future workshop-style process to update the implementation strategies. Additionally, we have included an assessment in a table format and that addresses each action step in a separate document (as an initial review prior to Town staff finalization). This component will assist officials with future informed decisions regarding potential amendments to the action steps.

5.1 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The South Carolina comprehensive planning process is a systematic preparation and 5-year re-evaluation of state-mandated and Town-specific planning elements, needs and goals which are implemented through policies and an annual action plan. The Town has made significant progress implementing the 2007 Comprehensive Plan and the document is generally structured in compliance with state-required approach to planning. We have presented several recommendations to increase the effectiveness of this approach and the document as both a policy guide and a 10-year work plan. This will ensure the action steps moving forward are concise, consolidated and achievable and can be easily monitored on a more frequent, potentially annual, basis.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

After assessing the overall strategy and feasibility of implementation, we recommend that a priority update to the Comprehensive Plan is a revised and reformatted implementation strategy. These recommendations will increase the effectiveness and value of the Town’s long-range planning guidance.

1. ***Re-structure:*** Each chapter should conclude with an implementation strategy. The existing needs, goals and implementation steps after each sub-section have the tendency to be lost throughout

SC PLANNING PROCESS

The South Carolina comprehensive planning process is one “which will result in the systematic preparation and continual re-evaluation and updating of those elements considered critical, necessary, and desirable to guide the development and redevelopment of its area of jurisdiction (SECTION 6-29-510 A).” That language encompasses a wide spectrum of issues (elements) and to ensure the systematic and “comprehensive” approach to development of the document, each chapter must be structured as follows (SECTION 6-29-510 C):

1. Inventory of existing conditions;
2. A statement of needs and goals;
3. Implementation strategies with time frames.



can be prioritized with most immediate steps in the forefront. Each action should have a priority, timeframe, responsible party and partnering agency as appropriate (Figure 5-1). The ultimate goal should be to produce a user-friendly work plan to guide and monitor progress over a 10-year timeframe.

2. **Classify**: Actions could also be classified as: support of partnering jurisdictions and agencies, Town programs or services, ordinance revisions, capital projects, etc.
3. **Relocate/Move**: A number of important policies are found within the implementation tables. Unless a specific action is necessary, such as a formal resolution, policies should be relocated and recognized in each chapter as the overarching guidance for future decision-making.
4. **Summarize**: A final chapter or implementation section can compile all actions in one location, especially as several actions implement goals documented in multiple chapters. The summary implementation section will ensure that one concise worksheet is available for annual progress review and monitoring. While each chapter will conclude with an implementation strategy as recommended in the “restructure” paragraph, this particular section can be sorted by classification, as noted in the “classify” recommendation. This is important as it will consolidate similar actions between chapters and provide a better way to implement the plan: by classification and priority instead of by chapter (Figure 5-2).
5. **Revise**: Certain implementation activities are underway and should remain in the strategy until finalized. However, the direction may have changed during implementation resulting in the need for slight revisions and rewording to ensure accuracy.
6. **Consolidate**: As elements and actions interrelate, duplications are present throughout the document. Consolidation is recommended to streamline the strategy.
7. **Delete**: A number of actions can be deleted because they have been completed or they no longer are necessary to meet the needs of the Town. Completed actions can be archived in an appendix or within the official records of the five (5) year review process.
8. **Workshop**: As the revision of the implementation strategy is a priority update, we recommend a future workshop approach to the update. At present, it is not feasible to expect the Planning Commission to review the entire combined strategy. If steps 1-6 can be accomplished prior to a series of workshops, staff could solicit valuable input to ensure the streamlined strategy will meet resident needs and accomplish the documented goals.

Figure 5-1 Restructured and Classified Table Format- End of Each Chapter

Action Step	Responsible Parties and Partners	Priority	Classification
Describe specific action to be completed to attain goal. Do not include policies.	List responsible parties and note project manager. List partners necessary to complete action. Abbreviations are recommended.	Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3	Zoning Ordinance Amendment Resolution Capital Project Program



Figure 5-2 Implementation Summary- Zoning Ordinance Amendments (example)

Action Step	Responsible Parties and Partners	Priority	Annual Progress
Describe specific zoning ordinance revision or area to investigate.	List responsible parties and note project manager. List partners necessary to complete action. Abbreviations are recommended.	Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3	Complete In-Progress and Status Incomplete

5.3 SUMMARY

The 2007 plan includes an exhaustive list of policies, potential partnerships, services, programs and specific actions to achieve goals. Our summary-level review of the implementation strategy revealed a number of findings which helped to guide our earlier recommendations. The table below summarizes our audit:

Implementation Strategy Audit- At a Glance			
Status	Total	Percent	Recommendation
Completed	51	16%	Delete but archive
Completed and implemented as a re-occurring program or service	75	23%	Keep, revise as necessary
Incomplete, but appropriate	35	11%	Keep, revise as necessary
In progress (with end date)	5	1.5%	Keep, revise as necessary
Current policy (without end date)	77	24%	Policies should not be included in the implementation table
Consolidated or not recommended	78	24%	Delete
Total	321	100%	

Based on this higher-level review of the strategy, we believe that almost two-thirds of the actions can be removed from the implementation strategy to consolidate and streamline the Town's work plan. A consolidated strategy will be more manageable and attainable and will increase user-friendliness.

5.4 EXISTING TABLES

Tables from the 2007 plan which show our summary-level review comments and classifications which helped to develop the above summary audit table are included in a separate document. A review of Town comments was considered. The task was not intended to serve as an all-inclusive review of the 321 actions included in the plan, but a general audit which served as the basis for our earlier implementation strategy recommendations.



6 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

While the intent of the Audit is to ensure that the Plan can confidently be used to support decisions on land use, zoning and capital investments, the final Section reviews best practices and trends in the field of planning. Our review of the 2007 Plan indicated that the concepts and practices listed are relevant to the present day and future needs of the Town.

6.1 DATA USE

Updated population, housing and economic data is essential for Comprehensive Plan compliance and to have an adequate “snapshot” of existing conditions. However, the use of the data for true planning purposes serves an even greater value to the community. Data compiled from the 2010 US Census and from other more recent sources can be the base for needs based various national standards. Best practices in long-range planning efforts make this link: providing projections of future need for public facilities, land uses, services, transit, schools, parks and services for targeted for demographic groups with identified needs. A true understanding of demographic trends may ensure the most effective use of funds to maintain and increase “level of service” for several Comprehensive Plan elements, such as the aforementioned topics.

6.1.1 Housing Choice and Need

Demographic trends directly relate to housing choices and demand. National trends show that family sizes continue to shrink as a result of couples having fewer children, women waiting later in life to have children, single parent households and a decline in marriage rates. Therefore, many communities are planning for a more diverse population, a variety of family and household types, and lifestyle preferences. However, Bluffton’s recent household data stills show increases in children and young families, but with additional focus on high tech industries, entertainment and recreation, the population of young adults without families (or small families) could add to the demand for alternative housing types. Smaller families and couples may desire alternatives to single-family detached, owner-occupied housing, such as townhomes, flats, and apartments above storefronts.

The housing needs of special groups, like the elderly, must also be considered. Viable senior housing options may range from remaining at home as long as possible to smaller single level homes to congregate living. Long-time residents should not be forced out of the community when they decide a large multi-storied home is no longer consistent with their lifestyle but wish to stay in the community they like near family and friends, a concept coined “aging in place.” While there are a number of options for the recently retired population, there may be a demand for senior housing options that are closer to goods and services or in close proximity to planned public transit to ensure adequate mobility.

Trends should be monitored at the local level to ensure needs are met and the housing choices are available to retain the Town’s existing population and to remain an attractive location for potential residents. Gaps in the housing stock may be evident during further assessment of the population and housing trends.

6.1.2 Transit

Understanding demographic trends, housing choice and growing segments in the Town also directly relate to the transit system. Transit planning should recognized areas prioritize for dense mixed-use



nodes and village, appropriate candidates for transit oriented development. Senior population transit access demand will also increase with “aging in place” planning, as mentioned earlier. Specialized transportation services—typically by van, small bus, or taxi—provide essential transportation and independence for those who may have difficulty using future-planned fixed-route public transportation service because of disability, age-related conditions, or income constraints. Use of more detailed census tract, block group and block data can help to identify target populations that may require special consideration.

6.1.3 Community Facilities and National Standards

The use of national or industry standards for community facility planning is a best practice that will assist Town officials determine if current desired level of service requirements are being met and if future targets will be met based on projected population increases.

For a simplified example purpose, there are a variety of park types that are classified by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) and standards have been developed for planning purposes. Not only can current level of service be assessed, but future projected need. In this higher growth rate scenario, unless there was an excess of park acreage at present, the Town would need to plan for 290.75 acres based on NRPA standards. While standards can provide a base for planning, this method can also be customized to consider the Town’s unique water resources and private recreation options.

Additional Public Parkland Acreage (based on 2010 to 2025 projected population increase)		
Park Classification	NRPA Guideline (per 1,000 residents)	15-Year Need Projections (18,000 increase- Average Growth Rate
Mini Parks	0.375 acres	6.75 acres
Neighborhood Parks	1.75 acres	31.5 acres
Community Parks	6.50 acres	117 acres
Regional Parks	7.50 acres	135 acres
Total		290.75 acres



It is important to consider both public and private community facility types (parks, libraries, schools, private recreation, water access, etc.) and the location and disbursement of these assets throughout the Town and Southern Beaufort County. When evaluating service areas, it is important to specifically consider current and future residential clusters. By mapping service areas, the underserved areas are apparent and can receive attention during the future Comprehensive Plan update. Projected-need based planning for community facilities can be an extremely valuable tool for decision makers over the term of the next Comprehensive Plan.

6.2 TRANSPORTATION

6.2.1 Plans and Data

Since the last Plan, regional transportation planning has been further formalized through the establishment of the MPO. Between the planning organization and the recent regional traffic modeling effort, the Comprehensive Plan should recognize and reflect the valuable transportation data available. Updated traffic counts, volume to capacity ratios, crash data, bicycling/pedestrian accommodations, transit ridership and other traffic model data can serve as a base for planning efforts.

6.2.2 Funding Opportunities

The Plan should respond to changes in transportation funding at the federal and state level for non-motorized transportation and these opportunities should be examined and be identified in the Priority Investment Chapter. Since the Comp Plan was last updated, there has been more emphasis on funding “complete” or livable streets, especially for non-motorized travel. Additionally, the Town should continue to capitalize on funding available through the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. SRTS programs are typically recommended for locations where improvements are likely to increase walking and biking.

6.2.3 Complete Streets

Through what is commonly called the Complete Streets movement, improvements to the transportation system should not only provide safe and smooth auto travel, but also ensure the roads meet the needs for all types of travel (walking, bicycling, and transit) for people of different ages and physical abilities.

In addition, the transportation system should also meet the needs of larger population of retirees and encourage more walking and

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Safe Routes to School seeks to improve the environment for students walking and biking to school in hopes they will choose these options. If successful, SRTS programs can provide many community benefits, including but not limited to:

- Improved community health results from increased physical activity, which will lessen the likelihood of child and adult obesity, reduce the number of coronary heart disease deaths, lower blood pressure, reduce occurrence of diabetes and cancer, and lower health care costs.
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions results from fewer and shorter car trips.
- Improved social justice results from higher quality non-motorized networks created through the SRTS process. At least one third of American’s don’t drive, and about half wish they could walk more.



biking for the school aged generation as well. Nationally, this approach strives to harmonize streets with their surroundings while interlacing transportation networks to meet the mobility needs of all users: motorists, goods movement, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and emergency service vehicles. Many communities set the stage for Complete Streets planning through the Comprehensive Plan and adopt additional resolutions in support of implementation.

6.2.4 Context Sensitive Design

Street design should consider the compatibility with the surrounding area using an approach called “Context Sensitive Design.” This means streets that serve the same traffic function (i.e. state route, arterial, collector, or local street) may have a different design depending upon where they are located. During this approach, roads are given a functional classification based on the “character” of the planning corridor. Elements include:

- Narrower lanes: Speed control and more room for amenities.
- Streetscape elements: Street trees, benches, lighting, and landscaping.
- Improvements: Median islands, high-visibility crosswalks, pavement markings.

While the current plan covers this concept in the discussion of corridor planning, implementation actions can be further refined.

6.2.5 Safety

Best practices for bicycle and pedestrian facilities and crossings can be further examined in the Comprehensive Plan update. Elements such as beacons, sandwich board signs and striping can guide cyclists and pedestrians and increase motorist awareness of alternative forms of transportation. Goals for area targeted in the Plan should be to reduce vehicle speeds, potential for conflict and safe alternative means of transportation.

6.2.6 Transportation Impact Analysis

Transportation Impact Analysis is a much more comprehensive approach to transportation issue than Traffic Impact Analysis reports that are typically provided by developers. Transportation Impact Analysis reports cover much more than automobile traffic by incorporating bicycle, pedestrian and transit accommodations. This requires that in addition to traffic counts, such studies provide data on pedestrian and bicycle use. The Highway Capacity Manual outlines procedures for measuring multi-modal quality of service but it can also be done through a more qualitative evaluation of how to improve access and mobility for all users. The Comprehensive Plan can set in motion the consideration of policies that consider more than traffic impact but all modes of transportation.



- Evaluates all modes (autos, biking, walking, and transit).
- Set minimum LOS standards for each (e.g. LOS C for pedestrians, LOS E for vehicles).
- Adjust development to mitigate impacts & improve performance.
- Incentivizes alternative modes of transportation.
- Considers multi-modal Quality of Service: vehicle LOS versus bike/ped/transit QOS.
- LOS of Service- “D” is ok to reduce to “E” if QOS is higher.



6.2.7 Connectivity

The Town could also take more assertive stance to provide connectivity between PUDs and during renegotiating. While many of the PUD's are large and desire some level of exclusiveness, transportation links can help reduce auto travel. In addition, linkages can encourage people to walk and bicycle more frequently between neighborhoods, to the commercial districts or to other destinations. Connections can also provide alternatives to emergency vehicles, which provides safety benefits. Where the roads are private, there can still be easements to allow connections. Road connectivity should be considered if planned from conceptual stages but at minimum bike and pedestrian connectivity should be required in Town developments.

6.2.8 Access Management

Access management involves techniques to reduce the number of crashes and improve flow for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. This is accomplished through control over the number and placement of access points, particularly commercial driveways along major streets. Several major roads in Bluffton apply a form of access management through medians that restrict left turns. It is helpful if the development that lines those roads have interconnections so people can travel between businesses without reentering the main roadway. There has been a considerable amount of new research on access management that could be acknowledged in the plan update. In conjunction with the County Engineering Department, continued access management planning can help to achieve safety and LOS goals.

6.2.9 Roundabouts

One potential approach to some problem signalized or three or four-way stop intersections is a modern roundabout. Roundabouts have been shown to reduce delay and the number and severity of crashes by replacing traffic signals and turn lanes with a constant-flow circular intersection. Incoming traffic yields to pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the street and to vehicles already in the roundabout before proceeding around to the desired street. Because of the many benefits, hundreds of modern roundabouts have been constructed in just the last few years. The planning process could help identify problem intersections with qualifying conditions for this approach.

6.2.10 Transit

As discussed earlier, population observations and trends should be incorporated into transit planning. It may be necessary for the Palmetto Breeze commuter fixed-route and demand response services to change and expand over time to respond to shifts and increases in populations. Based on observed trends and projections, specified transit options will be apparent. The Town can assist with transit system planning by understanding the demographic changes that necessitate transit and the land use concentrations, such as mixed use and TOD nodes that can be planned harmoniously with the network.

6.3 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

6.3.1 Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing

The Town should consider a comprehensive assessment of regulatory barriers to affordable housing to comply with the PIA and to assess the UDO to identify housing regulations that could qualify as non-essential:



1. Complicated administrative and permitting procedures;
2. Unreasonable and expensive building code requirements for rehabilitation projects;
3. Large lot single-family zoning;
4. Prohibitions on accessory apartments;
5. High development and permit fees;
6. Complex or discriminatory public review requirements;
7. Shortage of mixed use zoning districts and land zoned for multifamily housing;
8. Excessive spacing requirements for group homes;
9. Excessive requirements for group homes; and
10. Discriminatory treatment of manufactured housing.

6.3.2 Market-Based Incentives for Affordable Housing

In addition to lifting regulatory barriers in certain cases, market-based incentives may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Density bonuses, allowing developers to build at densities higher than residential zones typically permit, allowing developers to build qualified affordable housing at densities higher than typically permitted, or allowing developers to purchase density by paying into a local housing trust fund;
2. Relaxed zoning regulations including, but not limited to, minimum lot area requirements, limitations of multifamily dwellings, minimum setbacks, yard requirements, variances, reduced parking requirements, and modified street standards;
3. Reduced or waived fees including those fees levied on new development;
4. Projects where affordable housing is addressed, reimburse permit fees upon certification that dwelling unit is affordable and waive up to one hundred percent of sewer/water tap-in fees for affordable housing units;
5. Fast-track permitting including, but not limited to, streamlining and expediting the permitting process for affordable housing developments to help reduce private sector costs and delays; and
6. Allowing for greater design flexibility, including preapproved design standards for expedited approval and promoting infill development, mixed use and accessory dwellings.

Source: South Carolina Association of Counties

6.3.3 Establish Priority Investment Zones

As discussed in Section 4.5, the Town may adopt market based incentives or relax or eliminate certain housing regulatory requirements to encourage private development of affordable housing. While there are a number of zoning tools available, the benefit of a Priority Investment overlay or floating zone is that it could be applied anywhere in the Town to provide flexibility and incentives. The resulting tools can be less cumbersome than the PUD process and streamlined to be attractive to developers.

With the use of a tool of this nature, additional factors in a qualifying criteria should be development and in no case should housing types prohibited in a district be allowed. The tool is meant to relax “non-essential” housing regulations to promote affordable housing and encourage TND design



6.4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

6.4.1 Market Assessment

A Comprehensive Plan high-level market assessment consists of tasks that will quantitatively and qualitatively identify market conditions and forces defining the Town's socio-economic composition and future opportunities. These will be later reflected in future land use scenario and land use mapping. A market assessment from the planning perspective could potentially consist of the following database development:

- *Stakeholder interviews:* Face-to-face interviews with key property owners, real estate professionals, financial institution leaders and developer interests.
- *Resident surveys:* Surveys using the Town's website and other resources to generate information about spending patterns, household economic conditions and demographics not otherwise available through the US Census or other sources.
- *Business surveys:* Surveys through web resources or email survey with a focus on existing business conditions, desired changes and future investment plans and opportunities.
- *Focus groups:* Sessions of residential and commercial realtors and other members of the business community, as well as government agencies.
- *Inventory data:* A detailed inventory of non-residential activity within the Town and immediate surroundings based on U. S. Census of Business information.

6.4.2 Market Analysis

Ideally, a market analysis can serve as a base for development scenarios, accommodating a full range of future land uses. The market analysis will be based on solid information, regional and local trends and global and technology change that impacts land use at the local level. The following will help define market opportunities and future land use scenarios:

- *Gap Assessment:* A comparative assessment or "gap" analysis can be performed using select criteria reflecting the Town's location, transportation network, facilities, population, households and other factors. This will yield a set of businesses and industries for which there are identified market gaps. Understanding the previous work carried out by the Lowcountry Economic Alliance, the data can be used or supplemented.
- *Demand Forecasting:* The second methodology will define opportunities and activity by examining the demand for goods and services. It will focus on retail goods and related services, select entertainment activity and housing. Traditional multi-tenant office and industrial activity will also be analyzed, with demand based on labor force/employment factors. The analysis is expected to yield precise opportunities for the Town and any defined sub-areas. Current year estimates and projections by 10-year increments can be developed.
- *R & D and Tech Assessment:* Research can help to define very specific opportunities in the R&D and emerging technology arenas that could provide unique markets, assist with sustainability, use the area's natural resources, or link to existing activity and employers. Those having the greatest promise, based on competition and other factors, will be indicated.
- *Culture and Art Assessment:* An analysis of culture and arts, including Heritage Tourism, as an economic engine and image building component for the Town and assess the potential benefits to the larger region and the appeal of the Town. The culture and arts assessment will help



address economic and related benefits captured from current and future visitors and look at indirect benefits, such as advancing business recruitment, growth in housing demand, entrepreneurship and other creative relationships.

- *Strengths & Opportunities Economic Development Analysis.* Finally, a SWOT analysis can help supplement an evaluation of assets and competitive advantages and disadvantages based on all of the noted input and technical analyses.

6.4.3 Opportunities

Utilizing all of the data and analyses with respect to market gaps, demand and other factors, the following can be provided:

- Opportunities for the Town based on a twenty-year horizon.
- Definition of critical trends that impact viability.
- Identification of high priority business sites.
- Definition of critical mass, if any, and opportunities for and types of commercial, industrial, and other economic functions.
- Proposed changes to the current economic strategies.

6.5 LAND USE PLANNING

6.5.1 Scenarios

Much of the town's future land use is established by development agreements. Development fees were established in those agreements for traffic impacts and community facilities and services. The town administration generally monitors the pace of development and plans for infrastructure and programs to meet the demands as conditions change.

Some communities evaluate the potential impacts versus the cost of all that future development using a "scenario planning" approach. Workshops and small group meeting can begin to formalize preferred development scenarios for new development areas or for amended PUDs. Using CommunityViz, which is an advanced GIS software designed to help people visualize, analyze and communicate about important community planning decisions, growth scenarios will emerge and will be measured against the previously affirmed vision, goals and objectives.

In Bluffton, these scenarios may look at different potential futures such as:

- Gradual pace of development;
- Accelerated pace of development;
- More development of one type of land use in advance of others or concentration of development in more walkable and transit oriented nodes or traditional neighborhood development (TND).

Thoughtful and intensive community involvement is important during scenario planning workshops. During community meetings, real-time electronic polling could be used as a way of getting to a desired future (polling results to be projected onto a large screen, visible to everyone at a meeting).

Once a few "most likely" scenarios are identified, then fiscal modeling can be used to determine the overall economic impact of the cumulative revenue associated with those developments versus the cost



of town services. Once this is done, residents and community leaders could weigh in on what is most important, for example, the priorities to meet the needs related to the outcomes of each scenario. If a particular scenario has undesired outcomes, then town staff and officials can explore strategies to change that future. In some cases, the Comprehensive Plan and other policies could set a new course for the town on some factors, such as the types of housing or amount of commercial development. Some might involve changes to planned infrastructure, planned land use, or initiating discussions to amend development agreements. At the conclusions of a scenario workshop series, an overall preferred scenario may be established; preferably, one that satisfies community needs and desires, is able to be implemented by land use planning, and is fiscally responsible.

6.5.2 Land Use Plan

Once a scenario is established the Future Land Use ("FLU") map can be formalized. Existing and future land use categories should be consistent (maybe additional categories in FLU) and a narrative should be created for each:

- Character and detailed description.
- Location on map and explained in text.
- Density (residential and non-residential).
- Strategies to be implemented.
- Best practice tools (environmental, transportation, housing, etc.).
- Appropriate and desired primary and secondary uses.

Additionally, we recommend a comparison map showing FLU vs. Zoning to best exhibit areas where change is necessary. A "zoning plan" showing zoning districts which implement future land use categories, or where new districts are needed, is also recommended.

6.5.3 Growth Framework and Annexation Boundaries

As recommended during its adoption, the Town's Growth Framework Map needs to be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan. This Map provides the basis of priority investment areas for the purposes of both development and preservation. The Growth Framework Map can then be updated as necessary through the scenario planning referenced earlier. It is recommended this scenario planning completed as part of the forthcoming update to the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, as the result of past direction from Town Council on potential annexations and the formation of the Annexation Policy & Procedures Manual, the Town must also refine its future annexation boundaries to focus on areas most appropriate to incorporate, such as existing enclaves and "donut hole" areas.

6.6 DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS AND PUDS

Planning and regulation for development on much of the town's annexed land is established in PUD Development Agreements. Some of the Plan's recommendations related to the PUD's, if not part of those current development agreements, may only be achieved if those development agreements undergo an amendment process. We recommend that the town staff identify any key recommendations that would need to be addressed by amendments to a development agreement. In some cases, the developer may also desire changes to the agreement to better address current trends and market conditions and other recommendations could be implemented by mutual agreement.



6.7 IMPLEMENTATION

That action strategy prepared as an implementation matrix and will help execute plan recommendations. Recommendations will be identified for year one and subsequent years so they may be integrated into the Town's management and budgeting process and CIP. It will be formatted with each responsible party or department clearly noted and with prioritized assignments. Collaboration will be indicated where multi-department roles are necessary. The matrix will be completed in consultation with the staff to assure its effectiveness. Where appropriate, funding opportunities will be described. The recommendations in Section 5 are "best practices" concerning plan implementation.



7 RECOMMENDATIONS

This Section concludes with our prioritized recommendations concerning priority “interim” revisions prior to a full Comprehensive Plan re-write (first and second) and longer term recommendations for the full re-write (third). Priorities are generally those revisions that will ensure state-compliance and those which will most effectively assist present day efforts, such as economic development.

7.1 FIRST PRIORITY PROJECTS

First priority projects will address immediate needs, such as compliance with the State Comprehensive Enabling Act and the Priority Investment Act. We recommend a 6-month timeframe for completion.

- Adopt Census updates as provided- Chapters 2, 5, 6 and Appendix.
- Update plan with missing required content as outlined in Section 3, including the Chapter 10, Priority Investment.
- Incorporate the Growth Framework Map into the Comprehensive Plan.
- Refine Growth Boundary and Future Annexation Area Maps.

7.2 SECOND PRIORITY PROJECTS

Second priority projects will ensure that the plan is effective and user-friendly. Second priority projects also directly relate to current Town priorities concerning economic development.

- Complete revision of implementation strategy, per recommendations in Section 5.
- Market assessment, analysis and identification of opportunities.

7.3 THIRD PRIORITY PROJECTS

Unless addressed in first and second priorities, the remainder of the recommendations of Section 6 fall within this category.